

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**WOMEN URGED TO PROTECT THEIR HEALTH DURING
NATIONAL WOMEN'S HEALTH WEEK**

(RICHMOND, Va.)—The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) urges women to incorporate simple and manageable preventive health steps into their everyday lives during National Women's Health Week, which begins Mother's Day, May 14 and concludes May 20.

"Women lead such busy lives and shoulder so many responsibilities that they often forget to make their own health a priority," said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H.

For example, heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women in Virginia, claiming 7,042 in 2004. Yet many women have not had their cholesterol checked or know their blood pressure, which can help determine the risk for heart disease and other chronic illnesses.

Because women make roughly 90 percent of their family's health care decisions, VDH encourages women to make healthy lifestyle choices, lowering the risk of chronic diseases for themselves and for their families.

"Many of the leading causes of death among women can be prevented or treated if women get regular health screenings and adopt a healthy lifestyle," said Dr. Stroube. Women can protect their health by adopting the following habits:

- Don't smoke. Call VDH's Quit Now Virginia quitline at (800) QUIT NOW ((800) 784-8669) for a self-help Quit Kit or phone-based counseling with a tobacco treatment specialist.
- Be physically active for a total of 30 minutes most days of the week. Walk, dance or work in the yard. Do anything you like that gets you moving.
- Eat a healthy diet including fruits and vegetables. Limit the amount of saturated fat you eat.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Balance the number of calories you eat with the amount you burn through physical activity, and watch your portion sizes.
- Limit alcohol to one drink a day. None if you are pregnant or planning to be.

May 15, the day after Mother's Day, is National Women's Check-Up Day when women are urged to call their doctor and make an appointment for a preventive health screening.

"Regular health screenings act as your early warning system," Dr. Stroube said. "They allow your doctor to find potential problems in their early stages when they can be treated more successfully."

(more)

The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) offers these general recommendations for screening tests that women can get to protect their health. Talk to your doctor about which screening tests are right for you, and when and how often you should have them. Some women need certain screening tests earlier or more often than others.

- **Mammogram:** Every one to two years beginning at age 40 and yearly beginning at age 50 to check for breast cancer. VDH's Every Woman's Life program provides free mammograms and Pap tests to eligible women. For more information visit www.vahealth.org/breastcancer.
- **Pap Tests:** Every one to three years if you have been sexually active or are older than 21 to screen for cervical cancer.
- **Cholesterol:** Normal total cholesterol should be below 200 and checked every five years.
- **Blood Pressure:** Normal blood pressure is 120 over 80 or below. Check at least every two years.
- **Colon Cancer:** Start at age 50. Your doctor can help decide which test is right for you.
- **Diabetes:** If you are older than 45 and overweight, ask your doctor about screening. If the test is normal, repeat screening every three years. If you are younger than 45, are overweight and have other risk factors such as being physically inactive, have a family history of diabetes, are African American, Latino, or Native American, have high blood pressure or cholesterol, or had gestational diabetes, ask your doctor about screening.
- **Depression:** If you have felt "down," sad or hopeless for more than two weeks straight, talk to your doctor about getting screened for depression.
- **Osteoporosis:** Discuss bone health with your doctor and have a bone density test by age 65.
- **Sexually Transmitted Diseases:** Talk to your doctor about whether you should be tested.
- **Immunizations:** Stay up to date. Get a flu shot every year starting at age 50. Get a pneumonia shot once at age 65. Have a tetanus-diphtheria shot every 10 years.

A complete list of screening tests and immunizations for women can be found at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Web site www.4women.gov. For more information on women's health visit www.vdh.virginia.gov and click on Healthy Living.

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